

UNEXPLAINED MYSTIFICATIONS.

BY THE EDITOR.

THE Society for Psychical Research has without doubt done some good work. Its members have spared neither effort nor money to find an unequivocal proof of spirit communication, and yet they have failed. They have succeeded only in corroborating the convictions of those who were believers, but the most remarkable instances they can produce are insufficient to convert a skeptic. The case of Mrs. Blake is assuredly most noteworthy, and Mr. Abbott's description of it is instructive to any one who understands how to decipher the meaning of such experiments. Note, for instance, that a report of the facts written by Mr. Abbott himself was published in a daily paper with slight alterations and important omissions, consisting in explanations which "cast somewhat different an aspect on the case" than he had intended. And Mr. Abbott's mutilated account has been republished in Dr. Isaac K. Funk's fascinating book, *The Psychic Riddle*, where it appears on pages 158-165. There is no question but that both Dr. Funk and Prof. James H. Hyslop who communicated the account are honest and serious in their intentions to bring out the truth. And yet how different is the impression when we read Mr. Abbott's own statement in full as published in *The Open Court*.

Must we not interpret similar cases that appear extremely mystifying, in the same way that we shall have to interpret Mr. Abbott's statement of the Blake case when we read it in the publication of those who are anxious to find evidences of spirit communication?

It is natural for any man who seeks to communicate with his beloved dead to be in a hypersensitive state. So, for instance, Mr. Clawson is so overwhelmed after having been addressed by a voice that claims to come from his daughter Georgia, that he is obliged to interrupt the seance and give vent to his emotions in tears. It is not likely that under these circumstances he could be critically calm.

We must bear in mind that it is much easier to mystify than to explain a successful mystification. Some mystifications may from their nature be positively beyond an explanation to the individual concerned, and it will be wise for us never to jump at the conclusion that mysticism or occultism or any other theory of a non-scientific nature would offer. Here is an instance for which I can vouch.

A friend of mine, a poet of a delicate and high-strung temperament, Mr. Charles Alva Lane, of whom occultist friends claim that he could easily develop into a sensitive or medium, was once traveling in the South, at a time when psychic phenomena happened to be a common topic in the newspapers. He had just returned to the hotel from a stroll through the streets of the city when he asked for his key at the desk, and became involved in a conversation on telepathy and kindred phenomena with the hotel keeper, a business man of good common sense who was quite skeptical but granted that there "might be something in it." At that moment a messenger boy entered and delivered a telegram. Noticing that it was addressed to Mr. Lane the proprietor at once handed it to my friend who held it between his fingers and said, "Sometimes I feel possessed of a mysterious power which would be difficult to explain, and I may give you a sample of it right now. You see this message, and I suppose the envelope is thick enough so that you can not see through it. Yet if I pause a moment and concentrate my mind on it I feel that I can read the message and describe every detail of the handwriting, signature and so forth."

The hotel keeper shook his head incredulously, but Mr. Lane proceeded to read the telegram slowly word for word and described all particulars as to the lines, hand-writing, and other details, whereupon he handed it to the hotel keeper and requested him to open it. Everything was verified and the evidence of his psychic power was complete.

The case and all the details here stated are beyond doubt, and Mr. Lane would be ready to repeat the statement on oath. The hotel keeper will certainly remain puzzled over the occurrence for the rest of his life—unless he should read this statement of the case and its explanation.

I will now say that Mr. Lane had expected the telegram and had just inquired at the telegraph office when the operator said: "Yes, your telegram has arrived and the boy has taken it to your hotel, but if you like you can read the copy." Mr. Lane did so and re-

turned to the hotel which he reached a short time before the messenger boy arrived. Indeed

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

In insisting upon the principle that we must remain critical and that uncritical reports have to be ruled out, I do not mean to say that either mediums or believers must necessarily be frauds and dupes, for the real reason of the insistency of our belief in a communication with the souls of persons that have passed away from life, is that there is a truth in it. The lives of our ancestors are not wiped out as if they had never been. Their deeds, their words, their aspirations, the examples they set us, remain with us as living memories, and we can know very well what they would advise us to do under certain conditions. Their souls are actually with us and it needs no abnormal imagination to hear their words of warning, their encouragement, their advice, whenever we would need them. Thus their souls are living presences in us and continue to commune with us. This truth may assume the fantastic shape of waking dreams, and in abnormal persons may even be heard as voices, which would sound as if coming from the outside. It is by no means unusual that sensitive people under certain conditions actually believe themselves to be in communion with spirits that address them like objective personages hovering around them, and perhaps assuming visible shape. Auditory and visual hallucinations are nothing uncommon, and though they may often be symptoms of a diseased mind, they not infrequently give expression to the voice of conscience or of subconscious admonitions of deep significance.

The belief in immortality would not have arisen, and would certainly not be so persistent, were it not based upon an important truth. But we insist that while there is spirit there has never as yet been an evidence of the existence of ghosts.* While we often instinctively feel the truth and receive messages through indirect indications which some people have a peculiar knack of interpreting aright; there is no telepathy in the sense of a miraculous transference of thought which would take place without the mediation of symbols or other methods of communication; and religious revelations must be explained analogously.

A serious person who minds the voice of his conscience but was never trained in exact self-observation, is perhaps most liable to be mistaken concerning the inner voice of his convictions, and in

* We have treated the same subject in a previous article entitled "Spirit or Ghost," published in *The Monist*, Vol. XII, pp. 365-403, April, 1902.

case he gives expression to them, being a firm believer in the importance of his mission, he will insist with great assurance upon the objective reality of his message. Thus St. Paul, the Apostle, repeatedly uses such phrases as these: "This we say unto you by the word of the Lord" (1 Thess. iv. 15), or "For I have received of the Lord that which I also delivered unto you" (1 Cor. xi. 23), and "that which I have received" (1 Cor. xv. 3), and he insists that he himself and some members of his converts "shall remain alive unto the coming of the Lord," proclaiming then upon the authority of this "word of the Lord," "that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep" (1 Thess. iv. 15), and further down, "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air."

Those passages having remained unfulfilled can scarcely be considered as genuine prophecy, and yet we would not for that reason think that the Apostle was a fraud. He felt so sure about this inner voice that he uncritically accepted it as a word of the Lord, and in a similar way we must assume that there are enthusiastic believers in the Beyond who are satisfied even with the semblance of an evidence of their peculiar conception of immortality. They feel that there is a truth in it, and for the sake of the good cause they believe that there is no harm in stretching a statement just a little to make it more emphatic and convincing to others.

As an instance of how little even honest men care for accuracy when in their conception a great cause is at stake, may serve the following sentence, quoted from the autobiography of the well-known occultist, Dr. Franz Hartmann, who in speaking of the phenomena of Madame Blavatsky says:

"If it is true that she occasionally 'helped the spirits' or played some sleight-of-hand trick, I would not criticize her too severely for it; because her only purpose was to induce the people to study the higher laws of life, to raise them up to a higher conception of eternal truth, and teach them to do their own thinking."

In the same way also the incriminating document of Dreyfus was forged by a man who implicitly believed in the guilt of the accused person, and was inspired by the fear that a traitor should escape punishment for a mere technical fault in the law which required an evidence in a case which was so plain that additional proof seemed to him supererogatory.

Much of the evidence in matters of spiritualism is similar. No doubt there is much fraud, and no doubt there are plenty of people

who are anxious to be cheated and are grateful for sham evidence. Moreover it is a lucrative business to pander to the desire of such people. That under these conditions fraud grows rampant is but natural, and considering how easy it is to fall a prey to self-delusion, and how many opportunities there are to produce the slightest mystifications, by mere accident, by cunning, and sometimes by bold guessing, it appears really remarkable that there are not more inexplicable and occult phenomena than can actually be met with, and it is strange that their existence, as we ought to accept it, being granted, the value of the evidence disappears as morning fog in the rays of the rising sun. If now and then an inexplicable residuum remains which would make us believe in the possibility of telepathy or the existence of ghosts, we might comfort ourselves that if we knew the whole case we would smile at our own credulity and like Kant become ashamed of ourselves for having at all deemed the case worthy of a serious investigation.

If telepathy and spirit communication are true we certainly must or ought to be able to produce the phenomena of these peculiar faculties at will by regular experiment, and they would not remain limited to exceptional incidents occurring once in a while without regularity, and only under test conditions.

We do not mean here to attempt explanations of those incidents of the Blake case which Mr. Abbott confesses he is unable to account for. In our opinion they are not so extraordinary as to preclude probabilities which would reduce the mysterious facts to mere stultifications without even throwing any suspicion upon the honesty of the main actors concerned in this case. In some respects it seems to me remarkable that Mrs. Blake (being a regular medium who must be assumed to be acquainted with the business methods of her profession) was not much better posted on the personalities of her visitors and on their relations with the spirit world. The most important feature of this case acknowledged by the leaders of the S. P. R. to be quite remarkable, consists in the fact that an investigator like Mr. Abbott and an authority in the line of mediumistic tricks did not succeed in explaining all, but so far this experience has not made him a believer in mediums, and it would not be difficult to point out several explanations which are possible and would dispel the faintest shadow of mystery.